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ABSTRACT

This survey assesses the local impact and issues presented in the National Commission on Excellence in Education's report, entitled "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform." Macomb County, Michigan, residents no longer view unemployment as their number one problem. Although unemployment remains a major concern, almost one-third of the county's households cite high taxes as their main problem. A distant third (6 percent) is the concern for quality schools and education. Two weeks after its release, of the 37 percent of the residents aware of the federal report, 43 percent offered agreement with either its accuracy or results; 9 percent disagreed with the report. Among all county residents, 83 percent think the nation is risking the well-being of its people because of educational shortcoming, and 71 percent give improvement in education a high or top priority. County residents support: (1) an increase in the number and extent of basic required courses; (2) required standardized exit exams for high school graduation; (3) a greater amount of student homework; (4) a longer school day, but not a longer school year; and (5) increased and performance-based teachers' salaries, tied to an effective evaluation system. (Author/PN)

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PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION

A Public Opinion Survey of Macomb County Residents

May 1983

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PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION

A Public Opinion Survey
of Macomb County Residents
May 1983

Betty Pritchard
James Smarr

Conducted by the
Center for Community Studies
Macomb Community College

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PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION

Purpose of the Survey

Public education is part of the American way of life. As early as 1916, when John Dewey wrote Democracy and Education, there has been concern for quality schooling for all citizens. In today's accelerating technology, basic education is a critical factor in the functioning and contributions of individuals in our society. National concern for quality in education has recently come into increased focus through the work and subsequent report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education.

The purpose of this survey is to assess the local impact of the concepts and issues presented in the Commission's report, entitled "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform." Such an assessment can provide further direction and support for local educators and government leaders in their efforts to serve the people of Macomb County. Other interested citizens, along with businessmen and civic leaders, will also find this opinion analysis useful and informative.

Abstract

Macomb County residents no longer view unemployment as their number one problem. Although unemployment remains a major concern, almost one-third of the county's households cite high taxes as their main problem. A distant third is the concern for quality schools and education.

Two weeks after its release, 37% of the residents are now aware of "A Nation at Risk," the federal report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Of those who were familiar with it, 43% offered agreement with either its accuracy or results; 9% disagreed with the report. Among all county residents, 83% think the nation is risking the well-being of its people because of educational shortcomings, and 71% give improvement in education a high or top priority.

County residents consider their local school systems to be more effective than national perceptions. They do, however, support a number of changes. Most notably, they support an increase in the number and extent of basic required courses, required standardized exit exams for high school graduation, and a greater amount of student homework. They also favor a longer school day, but not a longer school year. Residents also cited agreement with the report recommendation for increased and performance-based teachers' salaries, tied to an effective evaluation system.

Funding for education may be achieved through shifted resources, though not from human services/benefits programs. A majority of residents (54%) support a tax increase for educational improvement, even in light of concern over high taxes. Local financing and decisions are not advocated;

it is the state that is most consistently seen as the appropriate funding source. State aid for private schools has some support (40%).

Methodology

This survey of attitudes toward education is based on 500 telephone interviews conducted from May 12 to May 20, 1983, by the Center for Community Studies at Macomb Community College. All interviews were completed between 10:00 A.M. and 10:00 P.M., including week-ends. The sampling frame was taken as households with telephones within Macomb County, Michigan. The sample was generated by computer using a random digit procedure to include those households with unlisted telephone numbers. It was stratified throughout the county proportionate to the estimated population within each telephone exchange.

The respondent selection procedure utilized the Trodahl-Carter grid to control for age and sex distribution within the designated households. In addition, the respondents were selected to meet the following requirements:

- Residents of Macomb County
- Adults, 18 years of age or older

Interviewers were trained in special sessions to insure understanding of procedures and controls, and to become familiar with the content and format of the questions for this survey. The interviewing process was monitored for quality and accuracy. Extensive efforts were made using callbacks to secure interviews with designated respondents.

All coding, data tabulation, processing and analysis were completed in-house through the College facilities.

With a random sample of 500 households, there is a predictable maximum sampling error of $\pm$ 4.5% at the 95% confidence level. That is, if the

survey were repeated, the results would be within 4.5% of the stated results 95% of the time. On a question that divides the total population into a 50% proportion, the true value of the proportion will be between 45.5% and 54.5%. On a question that divides the population into more decided proportions, the sampling error will be less. For example, if the survey results show a 10%-90% split, the maximum sampling error is $\pm$ 2.7%. The error for subgroups is larger, depending upon the number of respondents in the subgroup. The sampling error does not include any reporting bias that may exist.

A demographic profile of the survey respondents is presented in Table 1 and compares to data from the 1980 Census of Population.

Table 1

Macomb County Demographic Profile
Sample Size = 500

	1983 Sample	1980 Census
Male	42%	48%
Female	58	52

	Male		Female		Total	
Age	1983 Sample	1980 Census	1983 Sample	1980 Census	1983 Sample	1980 Census
18-24	16%	19%	10%	18%	12%	19%
25-34	26	24	23	23	25	23
35-44	23	18	24	17	23	17
45-54	17	16	16	16	16	16
55-64	13	14	14	13	14	14
65 +	6	9	12	13	9	11

Median Age of Adults

	1983 Sample	1980 Census
Male	38 yrs	39 yrs
Female	41 yrs	40 yrs

Home Ownership

	1983 Sample	1980 Census
Own	78%	79%
Rent	22	21

Occupation of Respondent

Professional/technical	15%
Business owner/Manager/Supervisor/Public official	9
Sales/Clerical/Serviceworker	22
Operative/Auto Worker/Skilled Craftsman	10
Retired/Disabled/Housewife/Student	25
Unemployed/Laid-off/On strike	16

Length of Residency

0-5 years	16%
6-10 years	14
11-20 years	23
21-30 years	26
Over 30 years	21

Total Family Income - 1982

$10,000 or less	15%
$10,001 - $20,000	21
$20,001 - $30,000	28
$30,001 - $40,000	21
Over $40,000	15
(Base=452)	

Households with Children

Preschool	17%
In grade school	26
In Jr. Hi or HS	26
In private school	5

Highest Level of Education

Less than high school	12%
High school graduate	35
Some college	37
4 years or more of college	16

Macomb's Number One Concern

The Center for Community Studies has tracked the major concerns of Macomb County residents over a period of two years. Table 2 presents a summary of responses, revealing the changing trends during that time. In four separate surveys, polling has begun by asking respondents, "What do you think is the number one problem facing the citizens of Macomb County today?" As an open question, with no suggested choices, the responses highlight those issues most prominent in residents' thoughts.

Until now, the most often cited response has been "unemployment." The strength of this reply has fluctuated with the unemployment rate, reflecting the penetration of the effects of unemployment throughout the populace. In October of 1982, almost half of the county residents expressed concern over unemployment. Now, in May 1983, unemployment responses have dropped to 28%.

A similar trend has emerged with inflation. The responses indicating concern over inflation have declined from 17% in December of 1981 to 3% in October, 1982, and now remains at 3%.

Increased concern, however, has been directed toward taxes and toward schools. Almost one-third (31%) of the residents state high taxes as the number one problem; a 5-9% increase over past surveys. Concern over some aspect of education was mentioned by 6% of the respondents. In previous studies, education was not cited often enough (less than 2%) to be coded separately, and any such replies were collectively presented among "other" responses. The recent focus on education may very well be attributed to the amount of media coverage of the release of the federal report on Excellence in Education. The report was released two weeks before interviewing began for this survey.

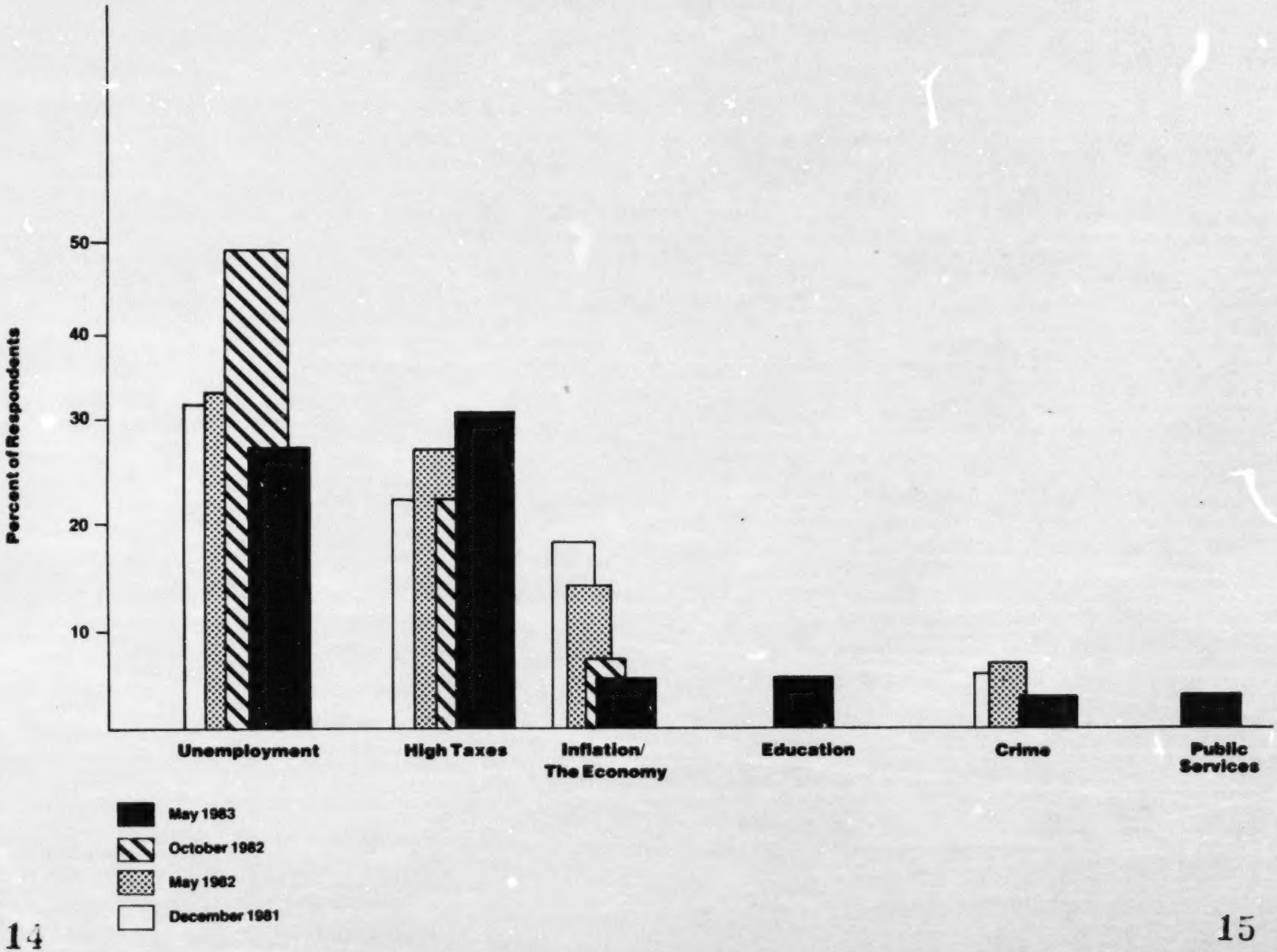
Table 2

Question: What do you think is the number one problem facing the citizens of Macomb County today?

December 1981		May 1982		October 1982		May 1983	
Issue	Responses	Issue	Responses	Issue	Responses	Issue	Responses
Unemployment	33%	Unemployment	34%	Unemployment	47%	High Taxes	31%
High Taxes	22	High Taxes	26	High Taxes	22	Unemployment	28
Inflation	17	Inflation	8	The Economy	5	Education	6
Crime	4	The Economy	6	Inflation	*3	The Economy	3
Other	9	Crime	5	Crime	2	Public Services	3
Don't Know	14	Other	11	Other	11	Inflation	3
		Don't Know	10	Don't Know	10	Crime	3
						Other	6
						Don't Know	16
(BASE)	(501)		(500)		(500)		(500)

Figure 1

MACOMB COUNTY'S NUMBER ONE PROBLEM



The demographic profile presented in Table 3 describes those people who are concerned with unemployment and with high taxes compared to the county population in general. Those most concerned with unemployment tend to be under 35 years of age, while those most concerned with high taxes tend to be between 35 and 54 years of age. The often heard claim that retired citizens are distressed by taxes is not supported by the results of this survey. Those over the age of 65 are, in fact, less concerned over taxes than is the general populace. Instead, they are more troubled by inflation, crime, and a variety of unrelated topics such as pollution, war, weather, and some very localized problems.

The most significant factors influencing the concern with high taxes, as supported by the data, are home ownership and income level. These two factors are highly correlated with each other. That is, the probability of home ownership is greatly increased with family income levels over $20,000. The separate influence of these factors on concern with high taxes is greater for income, however. It is particularly strong among those families earning between $30,000 and $40,000 annually.

Men tend to be more troubled by taxes than women. Fifty-six percent of those naming high taxes as a problem were men, compared to 46% of the sample being men. Women are more concerned with unemployment than with taxes, and are more concerned with schools and education than men are.

Table 3

Demographic profiles of Residents with Major Concerns

	Total Sample	Those Most Concerned With Unemployment	Those Most Concerned With High Taxes
Age			
18-24	12%	13%	7%
25-34	25	31	25
35-44	23	16	27
45-54	16	16	22
55-64	14	16	13
65 +	9	8	6
Home Ownership			
Own	78%	75%	89%
Rent	21	24	11
Total Family Income			
Less than $10,000	14%	16%	5%
$10,000 - $20,000	19	27	13
$20,001 - $30,000	25	25	27
$30,001 - $40,000	19	15	28
Over $40,000	14	9	17
Refused	10	9	10
Sex of Respondent			
Male	46%	47%	56%
Female	54	53	44
(BASE)	(500)	(142)	(157)

Awareness of Federal Report on Education

For nearly two weeks following its April 26th release, the local media, including The Detroit News, the Detroit Free Press and The Macomb Daily, prominently and recurrently featured the findings and recommendations from federal report by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. In spite of this widespread coverage, only 37% of the respondents to the Center's survey on education acknowledged definite awareness of the report.

Table 4

Question: Have you read or heard anything about the federal report on education just released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education?

Response	Total Sample
Yes	37%
No	59
Not Sure	3
No Answer	1
(BASE)	(500)

In order to examine more closely whether or not such limited awareness of the much publicized report prevailed among various kinds of respondents, several subgroups were compared: age, sex, educational level, presence of children in school, income, occupational status and type, presence of two working parents, length of county residency, home ownership, and perception of chief county problem. Only among four specific subgroups did a majority of respondents affirm positively that they had indeed heard of or read this report.

As might be expected, the respondents' level of personally acquired education directly related to their acknowledged awareness of the report. The higher the level of education, the higher was the percentage of "yes" answers (see Table 5). However, only among those who had acquired four or more years of college did a majority of those polled (60%) express definite knowledge of the report.

Table 5

Awareness of Federal Report by Educational Level of Respondents

Response	Less than HS	HS Grad	Some College	4 Yrs College
Yes	23%	28%	41%	60%
No	74	70	55	34
Not Sure	3	1	3	5
No Answer	-	1	1	-
(BASE)	(62)	(174)	(184)	(80)

Several demographic questions on the survey solicited information about the presence of children in the home who could conceivably be affected by the report's recommendations. Respondents were asked if there were children in the home at the preschool level, at the grade school level, or at the junior or senior high school level. Additionally, if respondents indicated that there were children in a K-12 system, they were asked if the children attended private schools. As Table 6 reveals, only a small proportion (5%) acknowledged private school attendance for the family's children. Seventeen percent affirmed the presence

of preschool children. Attendance in either grade school or in junior high or high school was identical at 26%.

Table 6

School Level of Children in Respondents' Families

	Total Sample*
Preschool children	17%
Children in grade school	26
Children in junior high or high school	26
Children in private schools	5
No school children	51
(BASE)	(500)

* Percentages do not add to 100% due to overlapping categories.

Survey results indicate that there is greater awareness of the Commission's report among respondents whose families had children enrolled in a K-12 system than among those whose families had preschool children. But at no level was there a majority awareness. Only among respondents whose families included children in private schools did a majority (56%) acknowledge knowing of the report (see Table 7).

With regard to occupation, the greatest acknowledged awareness of the report occurred among those who identified their employment as belonging to the category which included either business owner, manager, supervisor, or public official. Table 8 shows that 60% of such respondents indicated knowledge of the report on education. Table 8 also demonstrates awareness of the report with regard to income.

By income, the only group for which a majority of the sample confirmed having read or heard about the Commission's report consisted of respondents who cited the previous year's total family income before taxes to have been in excess of $40,000.

Table 7

Question: Have you read or heard anything about the federal report on education just released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education?

Awareness of Federal Report by Children's Level in School:

Response	Total Sample	With Preschool Children	With Children in Grade School	With Children in Junior or Senior HS	With Children in Private School
Yes	37%	31%	44%	45%	56%
No	59	65	51	52	41
Not Sure/ No Answer	4	4	5	3	4
(BASE)	(500)	(85)	(131)	(131)	(27)

Table 8

Question: Have you read or heard anything about the federal report on education just released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education?

Awareness of Federal Report by Occupation:

Response	Operative/ Skilled Craftsman	Sales/ Clerical/ Service Worker	Profess- ional/ Technical	Business Owner/ Manager/ Supervisor/ Public Official	Retired	Others Not in Workforce
Yes	31%	32%	42%	60%	38%	40%
No	67	66	53	40	59	54
Not Sure/ No Answer	2	2	5	-	2	6
(BASE)	(52)	(112)	(74)	(47)	(56)	(68)

Awareness of Federal Report by Total Family Income:

Response	Less than $10,000	$10 - 20K	$20 - 30K	$30 - 40K	Over $40,000
Yes	20%	25%	39%	41%	58%
No	77	74	58	55	38
No Sure/ No Answer	3	1	2	4	4
(BASE)	(69)	(93)	(125)	(96)	(69)

Thus, although the local press provided much publicity for the conclusions and recommendations put forth by the National Commission on Excellence in Education, Macomb County residents seemed largely unaware of this newsworthy report to the nation. Not surprisingly, those residents whose backgrounds indicated the strongest interest in education were apparently the most aware of the report. These included citizens who held college undergraduate or graduate degrees as well as respondents whose interest in quality education was manifested by the fact that a child in the family was attending a private school. Awareness of the report, however, also increased in direct proportion to the annual before-tax income of the respondent's family. Those whose families earned more than $40,000 annually were the only income group for which a majority stated that they did know that a federal report on the quality of the schools had been made. Finally, among occupational categories, the greatest awareness of the report existed among those who reported they were public officials or business owners or managers.

Why was it that with the exceptions cited above, Macomb County residents polled by the Center for Community Studies remained generally uninformed about a national report on education, one of such import and alarm that it roused the presses and broadcasters to give the story feature coverage? Perhaps some clues to the answers may arise in the following analysis.

Reactions to the Federal Report on Education

A variety of reactions were offered by respondents who said they had heard or read about the National Commission's report. As pointed out previously, these comprised 37% of the people polled in the sample.

As Table 9 indicates, about 43% of those who acknowledged awareness of the report concurred either with its accuracy or with its results. Only 9% volunteered comments that were negative about the report itself. Some offered comments which labeled the report "off base," "poor," "too idealistic," or "not good." Other respondents in this category simply expressed disagreement with the report's accuracy.

Table 9

(Asked only of those respondents who had indicated they had heard of the federal report on education.)

Question: What do you think of it?

Response Categories		
Positive to report's accuracy	13%	43%
Agree with report's results	30%	
Negative to report	9%	
Negative reaction	9%	21%
Other negative comment	12%	
Neutral comment	9%	
Recommendations offered	4%	
Other	3%	
No answer	10%	
(BASE)	(186)	

The report also aroused some negative reactions and negative comments from about 21% of the respondents who acknowledge hearing of it. The negative reactions were sometimes personal in that the respondents said they were "disillusioned," "shocked," "disgusted," "sad," or "upset." Or else they reacted to the report's conclusions as being "a shame," "frightening," "terrible," or "upsetting." Negative comments ranged from complaints that there was "not much to look forward to" or that the "country's not in good shape," to criticisms of education.

Regarding education, the following were some statements offered:

"The rich get a better education and the poor suffer."

"I doubt the efficiency of the schools."

"The educational system stinks."

It is ..."a flat failure"; "going downhill"; "not what it should be."

"Schools are bad."

"Overpaid teachers."

"Teachers have no control."

"I don't agree as far as (our) schools are concerned."

"I think we should be getting more (money for our schools."

"The federal government is not supporting education enough."

"We have some dumb students."

A few of the respondents (4%) offered recommendations that paralleled those of the report itself, ranging from extending school hours, to increasing discipline, to putting more money in education.

Some 9% offered neutral comments like "interesting," "not surprised," or "undecided", "What is there to think?" and "I suspect they brought up what everyone suspected about the schools."

With the exception of respondents who did not answer, the general opinion seemed to indicate either direct or indirect concurrence with one of the major thrusts of the federal report. That is, county residents agree that our nation's schools have suffered a shocking decline in quality.

Ratings of Education: Low for Nation, Higher but Declining for Local Schools

In the opening paragraphs of its report, the National Commission on Excellence in Education stated:

> "...the education foundations of our society are presently being erosed by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and as a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur--others are matching or surpassing our educational attainments."

According to this survey, those views seem to be shared by the citizens of Macomb County. When asked how they felt the educational system of the United States compared to those of other developed countries, about 58% indicated that ours was the "same" or "worse." The percentage rose to 68% among those who had completed undergraduate or postgraduate education, from a low of 44% among respondents who had not completed high school.

Table 10

Question: Do you think the educational system of the United States is better, worse, or about the same as other developed countries?

		Respondents' Level of Education									
Response	Total Sample		Less than HS		HS Grad		Some College		4 Yrs College	
Better	32%		42%		36%		27%		26%	
Some	22	58%	16	44%	23	52%	20	64%	28	68%
Worse	36		28		29		44		40	
Don't Know	9		13		10		9		4	
No Answer	2		2		2		1		3	

When asked if they thought "the nation is risking the well-being of its people because of educational shortcomings," 83% said "yes." The proportion of yes responses ranged from a low of 76% among those in the 45-54 age group to a high of 97% among those who cited education as the chief county problem. However, the proportion generally stayed near 80 percent regardless of their level of acquired education, the fact of their families having children in school, their awareness of the federal report, their occupation, their employment status, their income, their sex, their home ownership, or their length of county residency.

Table 11

Question: Do you think the nation is risking the well-being of its people because of educational shortcomings?

Response	Total Sample
Yes	83%
No	13%
Don't Know	4%
(BASE)	(500)

Macomb County Intermediate School District (MISD) has often polled students and county residents regarding issues of interest to education. One repeated question asks respondents to give school districts a grade for their performance. The same question was asked by the Center for Community Studies to correlate results. It has also been asked on national Gallup polls, and on statewide education polls.

Forty-four percent of the county residents gave an A or B rating to their local school districts. This finding is not markedly different

from that of the May MISD survey where 41% gave their local schools the same ratings, nor from the state wide Michigan Education Poll conducted in February. A significant decline is indicated, however, in comparison to a 1982 MISD survey when 55% rated local schools with an A or B.

In the national perspective, public education received much lower performance grades than the local ratings.

Table 12

Question: Students are given grades A, B, C, D, and FAIL to show how well they're doing in school. Suppose your school district were graded in the same way. All things considered, what grade would you give your local school district...an A, B, C, D or FAIL?

Response	Center for Community Studies Macomb County 5/83		MISD Macomb County 5/83		Mich. Education Poll State 2/83		Gallup Poll National 1982		MISD Macomb County 1982	
A	9%	44%	11%	41%	8%	46%	8%	37%	18%	55%
B	35		30		38		29		37	
C	24		32		30		33		18	
D	9		7		8		14		4	
FAIL	3		5		3		5		1	
Can't Say	20		15		12		11		2	
(BASE)	(500)		(350)		(800)		(1500)		(625)	

Interestingly, two subgroups analyzed for the Community Studies' survey varied significantly from the overall population. One consisted of the college graduates, 50% of whom gave high grades to local schools. Incidentally, this same subgroup was the most highly critical of education at a national level.

Table 13

Question: ...All things considered, what grade would you give your local school district...an A, B, C, D, or FAIL?

		Respondents' Level of Education			
Response	Total Sample	Less than HS	HS Grad	Some College	4 Yrs College
A	9%	18%	11%	6%	6%
	)44%	)42%	)43%	)43%	)50%
B	35	24	32	37	44
C	24	15	26	25	23
D	9	8	10	9	9
FAIL	3	3	5	3	1
Don't Know	16	31	15	13	11
No Answer	4	2	2	7	6
(BASE)	(500)	(62)	(174)	(184)	(80)

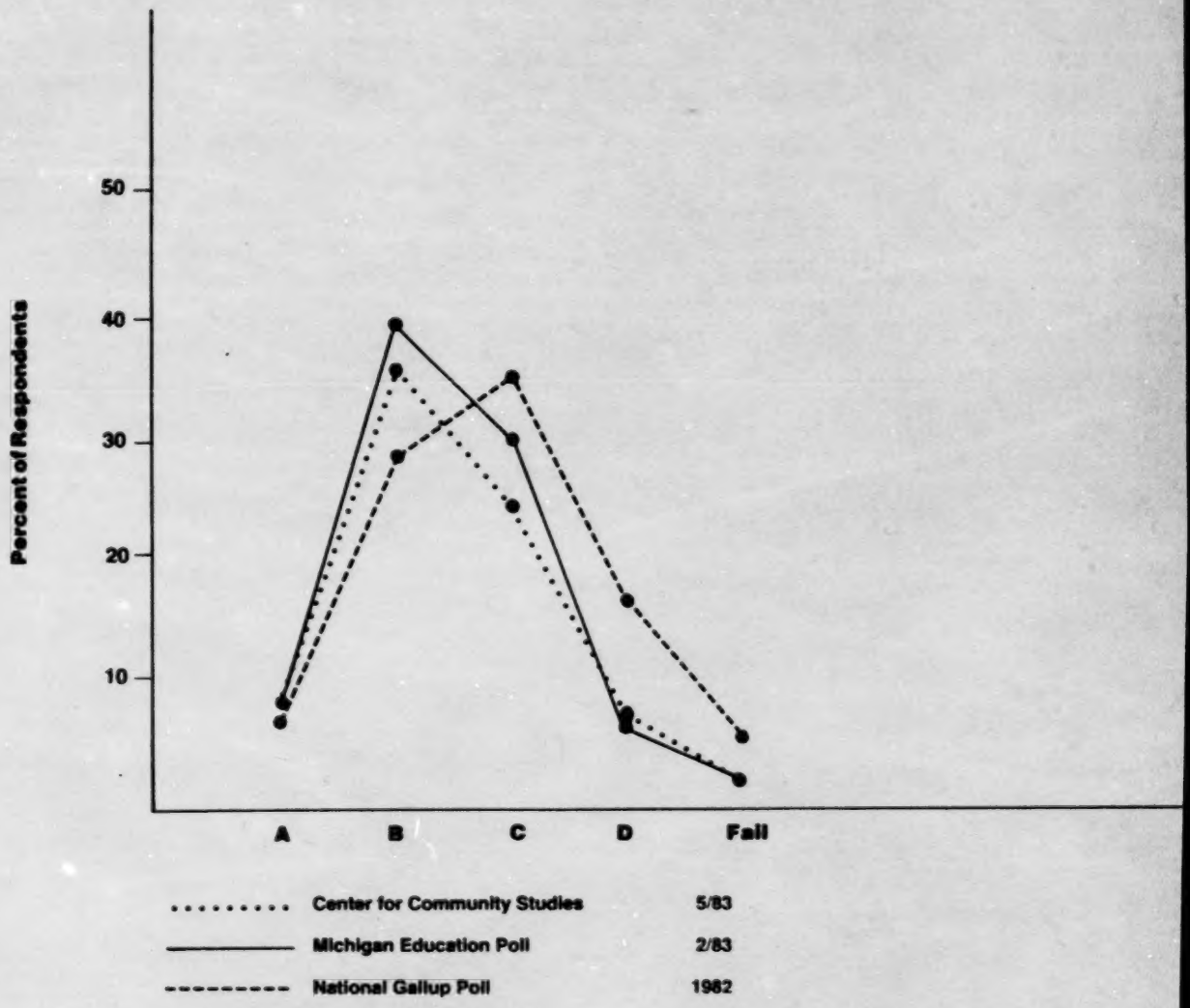
The other notable segment comprised the age group 18-24. Some 56% of these respondents gave their local schools an A/B rating--a percentage that was only one point lower than among graduating 1983 seniors polled by the MISD. Nevertheless, though a majority of young adults still seem satisfied with their local schools, there is some evidence of a decline in their numbers from 1982 when 62% of the high school seniors graded their schools with an A or B (see Table 14).

Table 14

Question: ...All things considered, what grade would you give your local school district... an A, B, C, D or FAIL?

	Center's Survey by Age						MISD's Survey of HS Seniors	
Response	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 & Over	1983	1982
A	3%	10%	9%	14%	9%	11%	9%	10%
	)56%	)43%	)44%	)49%	)38%	)35%	) 57%	) 62%
B	53	33	35	35	29	24	48	52
C	27	27	24	23	25	11	33	30
D	5	6	16	11	7	2	8	6
FAIL	3	-	5	4	4	7	1	1
Can't Say	8	25	12	14	26	43	2	1
(BASE)	(62)	(124)	(116)	(80)	(69)	(46)	(650)	(512)

Figure 2
GRADES FOR LOCAL SCHOOLS



Thus, so far during 1983, general majority opinion in Macomb County no longer rates local schools with superior grades. Three exceptions, of course, exist, namely among young adults, high school seniors, and perhaps possessors of an undergraduate or graduate degrees. According to majorities among these populations, local schools still deserve an A or B. Admittedly, county opinion of national schools is much lower by comparison. But that difference does not significantly diminish the fact that county residents are beginning to perceive a decline in the quality of education locally.

In fact, 53% of those respondents to the Center's survey who acknowledged awareness of the National Commission's report and recommendations indicated that they believed these "results" are true of Macomb County schools. But they appeared optimistic that the Commission's entreaty to the nation will produce results, inasmuch as 51% affirmed their belief that it will cause changes in education.

Table 15

Perceptions Among Those Aware of Federal Report:

Question: Do you think the results of the report are true for Macomb County schools?

Question: Do you think the report will cause changes in education?

Response	Results True of Macomb Schools	Report to Cause Changes in Education?
Yes	53%	51%
No	22	30
Don't Know	19	15
No Answer	5	4
(BASE)	(101)	(96)

Improvements in Education

The National Commission on Excellence in Education opened the recommendations section of its report, "A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform" by stating:

> "In light of the urgent need for improvement, both immediate and long-term, this Commission has agreed on a set of recommendations to act on now, that can be implemented over the next several years, and that promise lasting reform."

In presenting an analysis of county opinion about specific recommendations, it seems appropriate to consider first those survey results which reveal the priority rating that Macomb County citizens give to improvement in education.

Table 16 indicates a majority of county residents do not give top priority to improvements in education. Of course, this is not to say that they would give only minimal support to reforming the schools. In fact, as the ratings move from low to top, the proportions of responses increase. Only a very small proportion (3%) give a low priority to educational improvement, and the largest proportion (41%) give it a top priority. Moreover, 71% would give either high or top priority to the issue. The strongest support for making educational improvements a top priority is found among those residents who send children to private schools, and among those who view education as the county's number one problem.

Why is it that county residents believe that the need for educational reform rates high but not the highest priority? The answer seems to be that residents are still satisfied, though less, with their local school systems.

Table 16

Question: If it were up to you to give a priority rating to IMPROVEMENT in education would you make it a low, medium, high, or top priority?

Response	Total Sample	
Top	41%)	71%
High	31)	
Medium	23	
Low	3	
Don't Know	2	
(BASE)	(500)	

Improvements in Content

This survey included a number of the Commission's recommendations in its poll of Macomb County residents. However, in an effort to assess as wide a representation as possible of county opinion about these recommendations, the Center did not limit its questions to respondents who had indicated awareness of the federal report. Nor did it reveal that the proposed changes came from that report. Instead, the interviewer told the respondent: "I'm going to make some statements about possible changes in education that school authorities could work toward. Please tell me..." The following are several specific improvements which county residents would support, presumably for their local schools.

Stricter High School Graduation Requirements. The National Commission recommended the following with regard to content:

"...that state and local high school requirements be strengthened and that, at a minimum, all students seeking a diploma be required

to lay the foundations in the Five New Basics by taking the following curriculum during their four years of high school:

(a) Four years of English;
(b) Three years of mathematics;
(c) Three years of science;
(d) One-half year of computer science.

For the college-bound, two years of foreign language in high school are strongly recommended in addition to those taken earlier."

As it discussed implementing these recommendations, the Commission also stated:

"The high school curriculum should also provide students with programs requiring rigorous effort in subjects that advanced students' personal, educational, and occupational goals, such as fine and performing arts..."

The Commission's recommendation that graduation requirements from high school "be strengthened" does have support among county residents. Eighty-seven percent of those polled agreed to this proposition. However, only 32% strongly agreed while 55% simply agreed.

Table 17

Statement: High school graduation requirements should be more strict.

Response	Total Sample
Strongly agree	32%
Agree	55
Disagree	9
Strongly disagree	1
Don't know	3
(BASE)	(500)

Four Years of English and Math. A large proportion (72%) of the respondents favored requiring four years of English for high school graduation. County residents would even require four years of math--one more year than the National Commission recommended.

Table 18

Question: How many years of study of the following subjects would you require in high school for graduation?

Response	English	Math	Science	History	Computer Science
None	-	-	1%	-	1%
1 year	1%	1%	7	11%	14
2 years	11	13	36	44	29
3 years	15	18	20	17	12
4 years	72	67	36	25	35
Mean number of years	3.6	3.5	2.9	2.6	2.7

Perhaps, their belief that both subjects deserve four years of study accounts for the fact that on the May 4th MISD survey, 93% favored the Commission's recommendation for three years of math while 87% favored four years of English.

The Three Other Basics--Science, Social Studies, Computer Science. About 36% of the county residents said two years of science should be required, and another 36% said four years (see Table 17). However, the average number of years of those respondents who offered a preference was 2.9 years. The Commission, of course, recommended three years of science, and 71% of the respondents to the May 4th MISD survey agreed to this recommended number as the science requirement for high school graduation.

As for the preferred number of years for a history requirement, about 44% of those polled by the Center for Community Studies said two years. A fourth (25%) said four years. The average number of years for those who volunteered a definite number was 2.6 years. Again, this average comes close to the three-year social studies requirement recommended in the federal report--an amount which 65% of the May 4th MISD respondents favored.

Finally, 35% offered four years as the preferred requirement for high school study of computers. About 30% said two years. However, the average response among those who gave a preferred period of time for the study of computers was 2.7 years. Thus, it seems apparent that county residents think computer science is about as important as the study of history. And certainly, county opinion for the preferred amount of high school time to study computers far exceeds the half-year recommended by the National Commission.

High School Requirements for Foreign Language, Art and Music, and Physical Education. The National Commission strongly recommended "two years of foreign language in high school...in addition to those taken earlier." This survey did not limit its question to the preferred foreign language requirement for the college-bound only. Instead, the question asked, "How many years of study of the following subjects would you require in high school for graduation?" (see Table 19). The largest proportion (41%) indicated two years of foreign language and about a fourth (24%) said one year. The average number of years among respondents who provided a preferred number of years was 2.1 years. For the May 4th MISD survey, 65% agreed that the foreign language requirement for the college-bound should be two years.

The Commission recommended but did not specify a one-year requirement for the study of fine arts. However, 33% of the survey respondents offered two years and 30% offered one year as the preferred amount of time which should be required for the study of art and music. The average among those providing a specific number of years was 1.9 years.

Regarding the preferred high school graduation requirement for physical education, 28% said four years, 26% said two years, and 21% said one year. The average among respondents who indicated a preferred amount of time was 2.5 years--the same as the average for the study of history and more than the average for the study of foreign language (2.1 years) or art and music (1.9 years). Apparently, physical fitness seems to have a higher place in need among county residents than do the fine arts.

Table 19

Question: How many years of study of the following subjects would you require in high school for graduation?

Response	Foreign Language	Art/Music	Phys Ed
None	1%	1%	1%
1	24	30	21
2	41	33	26
3	9	7	12
4	13	9	28
Mean number of years	2.1	1.9	2.5

Improvements in Standards and Expectations

The National Commission on Excellence in Education offered the following general recommendation:

> "...that schools, colleges, and universities adopt more rigorous and measurable standards, and higher expectations, for academic performance and student conduct, and that four-year colleges and universities raise their requirements for admission..."

With regard to the implementation of this recommendation, the Commission made specific proposals about grades, standardized tests, college admission specifications, and textbook levels and choices.

In order to determine county opinion on several specifics included in this area of the federal report, the survey asked respondents to agree or disagree to a number of proposed changes.

Standardized Tests. As the Commission put it, the report stated that "Standardized tests of achievement (not...aptitude) should be administered...particularly from high school to college or work." The survey asked about requiring such tests for high school graduation.

As Table 20 reveals, 68% "agreed" while 16% "strongly agreed" that "Standardized achievement tests should be required for high school graduation." In other words, 84% would endorse this practice.

Table 20

Statement: Standardized achievement tests should be required for high school graduation.

Response	Total Sample	
Strongly agree	16%	84%
Agree	68	
Disagree	13	
Strongly disagree	1	
Don't know/no answer	3	

Required Courses in College. The survey also attempted to discover some information about college requirements although the federal report did not make specific recommendations in this regard, other than to say that colleges should advise applicants as to what such requirements are.

Table 21

Question: What courses do you think should be required in college?

Response	1st Course Mentioned	2nd Course Mentioned	3rd Course Mentioned
Math	29%	36%	13%
English	46	25	20
Science	6	12	28
Social Studies	5	13	18
Arts	1	1	2
Computers	7	7	9
Vocational	3	3	1
Other	5	4	9
(BASE)	(389)	(324)	(208)

As the table indicates, 389 respondents gave at least one choice, 324 gave at least two, and 208 gave three choices. English was mentioned first by about 35% of those responding to the question, second by 16%, and third by 8%. Math was mentioned second by 23%, first by 22%, and third by 5%. And science was mentioned third by 12%, second by 8% and first by 4%.

Admissions Standards for Colleges and Community Colleges. Table 22 shows the reaction to statements regarding college admissions and graduation requirements.

Clearly, Macomb residents do not agree that colleges should raise their admissions standards. Fifty-three percent opposed the idea, most (51%) with simple disagreement.

This opinion seems to be reflected in the percentage who agreed (70%) either with simple (60%) or strong feeling (10%) that admissions standards for community colleges should be easy, but graduation requirements "tougher."

Table 22

	Propositions	
Response	Colleges should be harder to get into	Community colleges should be easy to get into, but tougher in graduation requirements
Strongly agree	8%)	10%)
	) 41%	) 70%
Agree	33)	60)
Disagree	51)	22)
	) 53%	) 23%
Strongly disagree	2)	1)
Don't know/No answer	6	8

(BASE = 500)

Improvements in Time: Homework and Length of School Day and Year

With regard to the implementation of their Recommendation C, the Commission proposed, among other things:

> "Students in high schools should be assigned far more homework than is now the case.
>
> ...
>
> School districts and state legislatures should strongly consider seven-hour school days, as well as a 200- to 220-day school year."

According to survey results, Macomb residents (76%) concur with the Commission's advice about requiring more homework. Moreover, 63% agreed that the school day should be 7 hours--a finding that was six points higher than that reported by the MISD's May 4th survey. But county residents do not concur with the Commission about a longer school year. A majority (67%) opposed this proposition.

Table 23

Response	Children should be required to do more homework		Children should attend school for 7 hours each day instead of 5 or 6		The school year should be longer	
Strongly Agree	22%	76%	13%	63%	6%	31%
Agree	54		50		25	
Disagree	18		32		65	67%
Strongly disagree	1		2		2	
Don't know/No answer	4		2		4	

(BASE = 500)

Improvements in Teaching

The federal report included "seven parts" to the Commission's recommendation "to improve the preparation of teachers or to make teaching a more rewarding and respected profession." The survey of Macomb residents included two of these seven parts--one regarding the length of the teacher contract and the second regarding teacher's salaries.

Length of Teacher Contract. The survey statement varied slightly from the Commission's recommendation that teachers be hired for 11 months (see Table 24). However, as the table reveals, Macomb citizens seem to support the idea of a year-long teacher work-load. Forty-nine percent "agreed" and 11% "strongly agreed" for a total of 60% endorsement of the proposition.

Table 24

Statement: Teachers should be hired to work for the year instead of 9 or 10 months.

Response	Total Sample	
Strongly agree	11%	60%
Agree	49	
Disagree	30	
Strongly disagree	2	
Don't know/No answer	8	

(BASE = 500)

Teacher Salaries. Quoting the federal report verbatim, the respondents were asked to respond to statements about changes in teachers' salaries:

Table 25

Statements:	Salaries for the teaching profession should be increased and should be professional competitive, market-sensitive, and performance-based		Salary, promotion, and retention decisions should be tied to an effective evaluation system that includes peer review.	
Response				
Strongly agree	17%	73%	22%	84%
Agree	56		62	
Disagree	18		8	
Strongly disagree	4		1	
Don't know/No answer	4		7	

Again, a large majority (73%) of respondents agreed (56%) or strongly agreed (17%) to the statement regarding increases in teachers' salaries. However, even a larger proportion (84%) expressed agreement (62%) or strong agreement (22%) that salaries, promotion, and retention of teachers should be tied to "an effective evaluation system."

Funding for Education

Quality public education must be funded in some way by public dollars. Improvements in the existing educational system will necessarily be paid for either through a shift in financial resources or an increase in available funds. One method of increasing available monies would be a tax

increase earmarked for education. However, under the existing conditions with high taxes viewed as a major concern, careful analysis of such a proposal is necessary.

As Table 26 shows, a majority (54%) of the county residents say they would support a tax increase to pay for improvements in education. Contrary to what might be expected, those who view high taxes as the number one county problem are not significantly different from the general population in their support for such an increase. Furthermore, those who are concerned over unemployment are just as supportive of tax increases for education (65%) as those who are most concerned over schools and education (66%). By responding to questions of monetary support, residents relate a genuine endorsement for improvement in education.

Table 26

Question: Would you be willing to support a tax increase to pay for improvements in education?

		Perceived #1 County Problem		
Response	Total Sample	Unemployment	Taxes	Schools
Yes	54%	65%	51%	66%
No	40	30	47	28
Don't Know/No Answer	6	5	2	6
(BASE)	(500)	(142)	(157)	(29)

A closer look at demographic information reveals a description of those residents who would support a tax increase for education, and those who would not. Table 27 displays a breakdown by age and level of education.

It is not the retired citizen over 65 who is most against a tax increase, but rather those between the ages of 45 and 64. In addition, there is a direct correlation of the level of support for education with the amount of education the respondent has attained. Those who did not complete high school appear to see less value in putting money into educational improvements. Those with a college degree are most supportive of such a tax increase.

Table 27

Question: Would you be willing to support a tax increase to pay for improvements in education?

		Age of Respondent					
Response	Total Sample	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65 +
Yes	54%	61%	61%	56%	44%	46%	57%
No	40	31	32	39	50	52	39
Don't Know/No Answer	6	8	7	5	6	2	4
(BASE)	(500)	(62)	(124)	(116)	(80)	(69)	(46)

	Level of Education of Respondent			
Response	Less than High School	High School Graduate	Some College	College Graduate 4 Years or More
Yes	40%	51%	59%	63%
No	53	44	36	31
Don't Know/No Answer	6	5	5	6
(BASE)	(62)	(174)	(184)	(80)

Another possibility for financing educational enhancements is the shifting of available resources from existing programs. Residents were queried as to their willingness to divert monies from ten existing programs (see Table 28). They were most willing (64%) to sacrifice from the space program. The reader should be aware that this opinion was manifested just prior to the successful Challenger shuttle mission and does not reflect the effect of that endeavor. A majority of residents also favored the shifting of funds from welfare (54%) and from military spending (50%). These were successively followed by aid to businesses and economic development. Less than one-fourth of the residents were willing to reduce aid to farmers and unemployment benefits. Except for welfare, the staple human benefits programs of Veteran's Assistance, Medicare and Social Security received very little support for cuts (less than 10%).

Table 28

Question: Should money (to finance better education) be shifted from...

	Yes	No	Don't know/no answer
Space program	64%	32%	4%
Welfare	54	41	5
Military spending	50	47	3
Aid to businesses	49	45	6
Economic development	36	55	9
Aid to farmers	25	72	3
Unemployment benefits	21	76	3
Veteran's benefits	10	87	3
Medicare	9	89	2
Social Security	8	91	1

(BASE = 500)

The process of funding is closely tied to control, authority, and policy decisions. Residents were asked if decisions and financing should be left to local communities. A majority do not favor this proposition. Table 29 shows that 34% of the county population think federal and state involvement should be ended and decisions and financing be left to the local communities. Sixty percent say no. Subgroup analysis also reveals several notable points:

1. Those who have read or heard about the National Commission's report on education do not support local responsibility.

2. The support for local decisions and financing decreases with the educational level of the respondent, from 45% among those who did not graduate from high school down to 19% among those with college degrees.

3. The advocacy for local decisions and financing also decrease with income. Less than one-fourth of those with more than $40,000 annual income prefer the local involvement.

4. Home ownership and length of residency in the county are not significant variables in attitude differences on this issue.

5. The local decision making is endorsed more by families with preschool children than by families with older school children; and least of all by families that send children to private schools.

Table 29

Question: Do you favor ending federal and state involvement in American education and leaving all decisions and financing up to local communities?

Response	Total Sample	Those Aware of Commission's Report	Educational Level of Respondent: Less than HS	Educational Level of Respondent: College Grad	Family Income: Less than $10,000	Family Income: More than $40,000
Yes	34%	26%	45%	19%	41%	23%
No	60	68	42	80	48	73
Don't know/No answer	6	6	13	1	11	4
(BASE)	(500)	(186)	(62)	(80)	(69)	(69)

	Households with: Preschool Children	Grade School Children	Children in Jr. Hi or HS	Children in Private School
Yes	38%	27%	24%	19%
No	58	69	73	74
Don't know/No answer	4	4	3	7
(BASE)	(85)	(131)	(131)	(27)

The funding of private schools is an issue of concern to all taxpayers as well as those with children attending private schools. In Table 30, a majority (57%) of residents are shown to be against state aid to private schools. The amount of support changes significantly among those families utilizing private schools, but even among this group, one-third do not favor the financing with state aid.

Table 30

Question: Do you think private schools should receive state aid?

Response	Total Sample	Households with Children in Private Schools
Yes	40%	63%
No	57	33
Don't know/No answer	3	4
(BASE)	(500)	(27)

Sources of funding were suggested to respondents to determine perceptions of the best avenue of monies for education. The categories were not mutually exclusive, and multiple answers were coded as a combination of sources. State and federal governments are viewed as the most appropriate funding sources, with student tuition ranking low on the list (see Table 31).

Whereas the appropriateness of the use of state revenues is fairly consistent across income levels, the role of the federal government is not. As the total family income increases, the probability decreases for viewing the federal government as the primary education funding source. Yet, there is a significant increase in the endorsement of income tax utilization for education among higher income households.

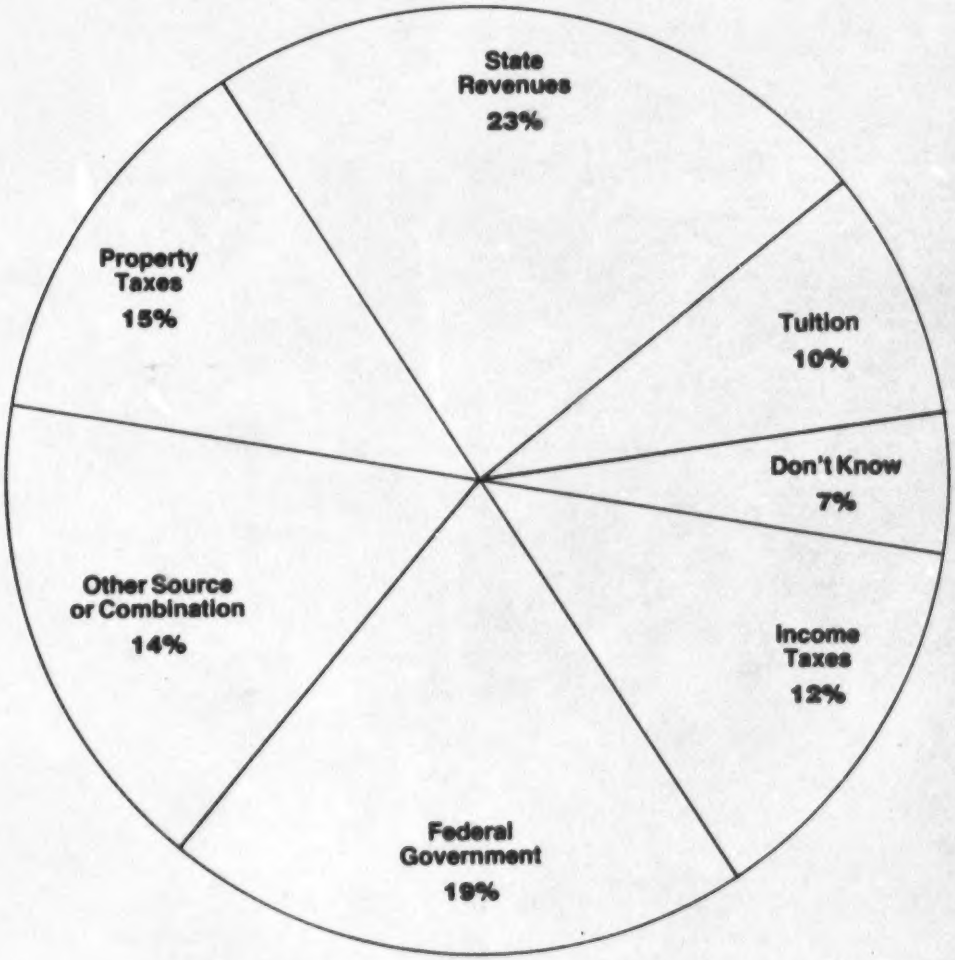
Table 31

Question: In your opinion, should schools primarily be financed from property taxes, state revenues, income taxes, tuition from students, the federal government, or some other source?

		Total Family Income				
	Total Sample	Less than $10K	$10-20K	$20-30K	$30-40K	$40K +
State revenues	23%	19%	26%	25%	25%	23%
Federal government	19	26	24	21	16	15
Property taxes	15	12	18	14	17	16
Other/Combination	14	9	8	18	13	13
Income taxes	12	10	10	9	17	19
Tuition	10	12	4	9	7	10
Don't know/No answer	7	12	10	4	5	4
(BASE)	(500)	(69)	(93)	(125)	(96)	(69)

Figure 3

PREFERRED PRIMARY FUNDING SOURCES FOR EDUCATION



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APPENDIX

1. What do you think is the number one problem facing the citizens of Macomb County? (OPEN END)

2. Have you read or heard anything about the Federal report on education just released by the National Commission on Excellence in Education?

Yes 1
No 2
Not sure 8
NA 9

3. (IF YES) What did you think of it? (OPEN END)

4. Do you think the results of the report are true for Macomb County schools?

Yes 1
No 2
Don't know 8
NA 9

5. Do you think the report will cause changes in education?

Yes 1
No 2
Don't know 8
NA 9

6. Students are given grades A, B, C, D, and FAIL to show how well they're doing in school. Suppose your school district were graded in the same way. All things considered, what grade would you give your local school district. . . an A, B, C, D or FAIL?

A 1
B 2
C 3
D 4
FAIL 5
Dont know 8
NA 9

7. If it were up to you to give a priority rating to IMPROVEMENT in education would you make it a low, medium, high, or top priority?

Low 1
Medium 2
High 3
Top 4
Don't know 8
NA 9

8. Do you think the nation is risking the well being of its people because of educational shortcomings?

Yes 1
No 2
Don't know 8
NA 9

9. Do you think the educational system of the United States is better, worse, or about the same as other developed countries?

Better 1
Same 2
Worse 3
Don't know 8
NA 9

I'm going to make some statements about possible changes in education that school authorities could work toward. Please tell me if you agree, disagree, strongly agree, or strongly disagree.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	NA
10. Children should attend school for 7 hours each day instead of 5 or 6	4	3	2	1	8	9
11. The school year should be longer	4	3	2	1	8	9
12. Children should be required to do more howework	4	3	2	1	8	9
13. Teachers should be hired to work for the year instead of 9 or 10 months	4	3	2	1	8	9
14. Salaries for the teaching profession should be increased and should be professionally competitive, market-sensitive, and performance based.	4	3	2	1	8	9
15. Salary, promotion, tenure, and retention decisions regarding teachers should be tied to an effective evaluation system that includes peer review	4	3	2	1	8	9
16. High School graduation requirements should be more strict	4	3	2	1	8	9
17. Colleges should be harder to get into	4	3	2	1	8	9

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know	NA
18. Community colleges should be easy to get into, but tougher in graduation requirements	4	3	2	1	8	9
19. Standarized achievement tests should be required for high school graduation	4	3	2	1	8	9

How many years of study of the following subjects would you require in high school for graduation?

20. English . . . . . _____

21. Math . . . . . _____

22. Science . . . . . _____

23. History . . . . . _____

24. Computers . . . . . _____

25. Art and Music . . . . . _____

26. Physical Education . . . . . _____

27. Foreign Language . . . . . _____

28. What courses do you think should be required in college? (OPEN END)

29. Would you be willing to support a tax increase to pay for improvements in education?

Yes 1
No 2
Don't know 8
NA 9

If educational improvements were made without tax increases, monies would have to be shifted from other government programs. I'm going to read a list of such programs and I'd like for you to tell me which ones you think money should be taken from to finance better education.

Should money be shifted from:

		Yes	No	Don't Know	NA
30.	Military spending	1	2	8	9
31.	Aid to businesses	1	2	8	9
32.	Unemployment benefits	1	2	8	9
33.	Economic development	1	2	8	9
34.	Social Security	1	2	8	9
35.	Medicare	1	2	8	9
36.	Veteran's benefits	1	2	8	9
37.	Space program	1	2	8	9
38.	Aid to farmers	1	2	8	9
39.	Welfare	1	2	8	9

40. Do you favor ending Federal and State involvement in American education and leaving all decisions and financing up to local communities?

Yes 1
No 2
Don't know 8
NA 9

41. Do you think private schools should receive state aid?

Yes 1
No 2
Don't know 8
NA 9

42. In your opinion, should schools primarily be financed from property taxes, state revenues, income taxes, tuition from students, the Federal government, or some other source?

property taxes 1
state revenues 2
income taxes 3
tuition 4
Federal government 5
Other _____ 6
(specify)
Don't know 8
NA 9

Now a few questions for statistical purposes.

D1. What is your age?

- 18-24 1
- 25-34 2
- 35-44 3
- 45-54 4
- 55-64 5
- 65 or over 6
- NA 9

D2. What is the highest level of education you've completed?

- Less than high school 1
- High school graduate . 2
- Some college 3
- 4-yr. college or more 4
- NA 9

D3. How long have you lived in Macomb County?

- 0-5 years 1
- 6-10 years 2
- 11-20 years 3
- 21-30 years 4
- Over 30 years 5
- NA 9

D4. Do you own your home or rent?

- Own 1
- Rent/lease 2
- Don't know 8
- Refused/No Answer . . . 9

D5. Do you have PRESCHOOL children in your family living at this address?

- Yes 1
- No 2
- NA 9

D6. Are there any children in GRADE school?

- Yes 1
- No 2
- NA 9

D7. Are there any in JUNIOR HIGH or HIGH school

- Yes 1
- No 2
- NA 9

D8. (ASK ONLY IF THERE ARE CHILDREN IN SCHOOL) Do any of these children go to a private school?

- Yes 1
- No 2
- Don't know 8
- NA 9

D9. Are you currently unemployed, laid off, or on strike from your job?

- Yes 1
- No

What is your current (or usual) occupation?

_____ (write in)

- Professional/technical . . . 2
- Business Owner/Manager/ Supervisor/Public Official 3
- Sales/Clerical/Service Worker 4
- Operative/Skilled Craftsman . 5
- Disabled/Housewife 6
- Retired 7
- Other 8
- Refused/No Answer 9

D10. Which of the following groups include your TOTAL FAMILY INCOME last year before taxes? (READ GROUPS)

- $10,000 or less 1
- $10,001-$20,000 2
- $20,001-$30,000 3
- $30,001-$40,000 4
- Over $40,000 5
- NA 9

D11. Is this a household where both parents work outside the home?

- Yes 1
- No 2
- NA 9

Thank you very much for your help on our survey.

SEX OF RESPONDENT (BY OBSERVATION)

- Male 1
- Female 2